

Book Review-2

Surajit C Mukhopadhyay, (2025), *Beyond the Binary: The Search for the Androgyne*, Kolkata: Aajkaal Publishers Private Limited; Price: Rs. 200.00

An eighty page analysis by Mukhopadhyay on the emergence and relevance of thinking beyond binary gender construction is an appropriate publication demonstrating the importance of thinking out of the box. An aptly written Foreword by Dhrubojyoti Chattopadhyay sets the tone for the analysis that follows. The book is a theoretical argument focusing on the multiple gender system taking the point of departure from the western ideas on gender construction. The argument is divided into seven chapters each concentrating on a part of the argument.

The first chapter deals with how androgyny is a holistic expression of self, taking the idea from Hindu idea of elemental unity of Shiva and Shakti. The next chapter deals with the sociological and psychological theorizing on the concept of androgyny. Desiccating the theories available the argument navigates through the various theories available and finally visits feminist understanding and critically posits the importance of gender(s) instead of binary opposition between male and female. In the second chapter the author explores the Indian context of thinking beyond binary gender construction. The difference between physiological male and female from psychological idea of masculinity and femininity is well explored taking examples from mythological experiences. The third to the fifth chapters reconnoiters the concept of androgyny in religion and mythology ranging from the Christian to the Hindu and posits the western theoretical with the mythological characters from India analyzing how the idea of a non-binary gender system was there in India unlike the West. The last chapter opens with the consequences of a binary system and what the implications of a non-binary multiple gender(s) situation might be. In the Epilogue the author connects between the consequences of the idea of a binary gender system, the worldview, the mix between tradition and the modern in the backdrop of a capitalist system and culture where the feminine has relegated to the margin, and the masculine has taken over to dictate the culture of contemporary times. The author warns us against this and wants his readers to acknowledge that fluidity in the understanding and practice of gender is significant for a future based on equity.

The practice of androgyny roles is to expand the range of roles that a person can play, and give the individual the strength to choose from a variety of characteristics according to need and suitability. To being able to move beyond stereotyped gender expectations and make choices is a contemporary idea which was popularized by feminists from early 1970s. Recent literature on

androgyny has the merit of dismissing earlier negative dismissals of androgyny and its importance promoting a supple complex between sex roles and gender performance. In this context the author has flagged a discussion significant in understanding the importance of gender socialization and performing gender roles. The work is timely, and a major contribution lies in bridging the Western (Occident) with the Orient and positioning the context that the idea was not 'modern' to India but a traditional position already in vogue.

The publisher needs to be thanked for such a book which criticizes the western and posits an Indian version on androgyny. It requires courage. The book cover aptly describes the content. The price is pocket-friendly. The language is lucid, clear and argument is upfront. It can be a welcome addition to the book lover's collection.

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